

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

SANDRA LEE YOUNGHANS

April 19, 1974



Sandra Lee Younghans was born on March 3, 1943, in St. Paul, Minnesota. When she was in high school, Younghans' parents moved to Colorado and she graduated from high school. Younghans married young, had a daughter and began college at the University of Colorado in 1965. Before her graduation from college in 1969, however, she unexpectedly found herself going through a divorce. She recalls feeling very vulnerable and frightened, and the experience of the divorce made her aware that she didn't have many rights and was easily "pushed around." Determined to find a measure of safety and financial security for the future, Younghans looked to the law.

In the late 1960s, women were encouraged to enter two professions – teaching and nursing. But, Younghans recalls, there were a few women doing other things, including the law, and that was enough for her to think "it was possible" to become a lawyer. Determined but a little frightened, Younghans entered the University of Denver School of Law in 1969. Her first year class was comprised approximately 2-3% women. Younghans studied diligently, and in 1972 graduated with her Juris Doctor. Thereafter, she took and passed the Colorado bar in 1973.

After earning her law degree Younghans was looking to move someplace new and to "get back to nature" (recalling this was the early 1970s). She considered Oregon, but settled on north Idaho for its majestic natural beauty. On April 19, 1974, Younghans was admitted to practice in Idaho and went to work for Nixon, Nixon, Lyons & Bell in Bonners Ferry. She recalls her early experience at the firm as "sink or swim" and was very thankful that the firm had good legal secretaries to help her through some difficult times. She litigated both criminal and civil matters for the firm – because "no one else liked doing trial work"— and eventually found herself doing more and more family law matters.

While in Bonners Ferry, Younghans began developing clients and a solid practice, but missed her daughter who had remained in Colorado with her ex-husband. Unwilling to be apart from her daughter any longer, Younghans decided to move back to Colorado in 1975 and resigned her active license in Idaho in September 1975. Upon returning to Colorado, Younghans opened her own practice, Wollrab & Younghans, P.C., in Boulder, Colorado, from 1975-1981, and later became a partner in the firm of Grant, McHendire, Haines & Crouse in Denver. In all, she was in private practice in Colorado for 25 years specializing in personal injury and family law.

Since retiring from the active practice of law in 1997, Younghans has been involved in numerous non-profit organizations. She is the past president of Women's Choice and is currently on the Ethics Board of Hospice of Boulder County. Younghans has served on the board of Boulder Valley Women's Health Center, Help Out Inc., The Interdisciplinary Board of Attorneys and Mental Health Experts for Boulder County, and Leadership Boulder. Most of her time is currently spent working with Friendship Bridge, a loan program for women and children in Guatemala. In 2004, Younghans received the Boulder Resource Center award for Women Who Make a Difference.

When asked about her work with Friendship Bridge, Younghans explains:

I have worked for the rights of women and children throughout my law career. Friendship Bridge gives me the opportunity to retire from my job and go further into my life's work. I am so privileged to work with an organization that does international work for women in such a personal manner.

Younghans has also been very active in her community, serving as president of the Downtown Denver Residents and she was active in the development of downtown Denver.

Younghans is married with one grown daughter and currently lives in Boulder, Colorado.